

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ISO-00 OMB-01 SAJ-01 CU-04 IO-14

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19

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R 121005Z NOV 73

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8688

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR, CH, BM

SUBJECT: CHINA AND THE BURMESE INSURGENCY

REF: A) RANGOON 2472; B) STATE 209710; C) HONG KONG 7538
OF 1972

SUMMARY:

PRC SUPPORT OF INSURGENTS IN BURMA PROBABLY RESULTS LESS FROM IDEOLOGY OR FROM ENMITY FOR THE SOVIETS THAN FROM A DESIRE TO DOMINATE A POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME BORDER AREA. UNLESS THE INSURGENTS ARE BLOCKED, PRC SUPPORT WILL LIKELY CONTINUE UP TO BUT NOT BEYOND THE POINT WHERE A NATURALLY DEFENSIBLE POSITION OF STRENGTH HAS BEEN CREATED IN THE AFFECTED AREA. WE DOUBT THAT THE PRC HAS ANY DESIRE TO ESTABLISH ITS "HEGEMONY" OVER BURMA IN ANY BLATANT WAY--AS BY INSTALLING A PUPPET GOVERNMENT IN RANGOON. IF THE INSURGENTS ARE FACED WITH SUPERIOR GUB FORCE, THE PRC WILL PROBABLY REACT, NOT BY ESCALATING ITS SUPPORT, BUT BY ADVISING ITS CLIENTS TO LIE LOW FOR A WHILE. IF THE GUB TOOK ITS CASE BEFORE THE BAR OF WORLD OPINION, THE CHANCES OF THEREBY CAUSING THE PRC TO CEASE ITS SUPPORT OF THE INSURGENTS WOULD PROBABLY BE LESS THAN EVEN, HOWEVER, WE DO NOT THINK THE PRC WOULD REACT BY ESCALATING ITS INVOLVEMENT. AS TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE BURMA SITUATION FOR OTHER NEIGHBORS OF CHINA, THE BURMESE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SUFFICIENTLY PECULIAR THAT THIS SITUATION NEED NOT BE THE CAUSE OF NEW OR GENERAL ALARM. THE BURMESE DEVELOPMENTS DO NOT FORETELL A WAVE OF CHINESE

"EXPANSIONISM." END SUMMARY

1. SEEMS TO US PRC CONTINUED SUPPORT OF BURMESE INSURGENTS RESULTS FROM VARIETY OF MOTIVATIONS, MOST OF WHICH ARE SUGGESTED IN RANGOON'S THOUGHTFUL EXAMINATION OF PROBLEM. MAIN MOTIVE IS PROBABLY DESIRE TO REINFORCE THE PRC ABILITY TO DOMINATE POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME BORDER AREA (AS IN GEOGRAPHICALLY CONTIGUOUS BUT OTHERWISE DISSIMILAR NORTHERN LAOS) AND TO A LESSER EXTENT BY MOMENTUM OF IDEOLOGICALLY-BASED COMMITMENTS TO INSURGENTS FORMED SIX OR SEVEN YEARS AGO IN CONTEXT OF CULTURAL REVOLUTION.

2. WE DOUBT THAT A DESIRE TO SPREAD "SOCIALISM" FOR IDEOLOGICAL
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REASONS FIGURES HEAVILY AMONG PRC MOTIVATIONS AT THIS TIME. THE PRC LOOKS TOWARD THE ULTIMATE EMERGENCE OF A "SOCIALIST" SOUTHEAST ASIA, INCLUDING BURMA, BUT UNDER CHINESE DOCTRINE THIS IS A HISTORICAL PROCESS WHICH SHOULD BE CARRIED FORWARD BY INDIGENOUS FORCES. THOUGH CHINESE DOCTRINE WOULD PRESUMABLY NOT RULE OUT ASSISTANCE IF CIRCUMSTANCES MADE IT NECESSARY TO COUNTER "IMPERIALIST" INTERVENTION ON THE SIDE OF A "REACTIONARY" GOVERNMENT, THIS IS CLEARLY NOT THE CASE IN BURMA AT THIS TIME.

3. APART FROM DOCTRINE, THERE ARE NUMEROUS INSTANCES AND AREAS (E.G., NEPAL, SRI LANKA, BANGLADESH) WHERE THE PRC HAS DEMONSTRABLY SUBORDINATED IDEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS TO THE STATE RELATIONS. IT SEEMS UNWARRANTED TO SUPPOSE THAT THIS IMPLICIT ORDERING OF PRIORITIES HAS BEEN REVERSED IN THE CASE OF BURMA, EVEN THOUGH THE PRC MAY WELL ASSIGN A FAIRLY LOW PRIORITY TO ITS STATE RELATIONS WITH RANGOON.

4. ANTAGONISM TOWARD SOVIETS IS A FACTOR IN SO MANY PRC POLICIES THAT ONE IS TEMPTED TO SEE IT HERE. AND INDEED PRC MAY REGARD BCP AND WHATEVER TERRITORIAL BASE IT MAY COME TO CONTROL AS A SOURCE OF LEVERAGE POTENTIALLY USEFUL IN COUNTERING ANY UNDESIRABLE POLITICAL OR DIPLOMATIC TENDENCIES ON THE PART OF THE GUB, INCLUDING ANY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SOVIETS. AID TO THE BCP MIGHT ALSO HAVE SOME VALUE, IN TERMS OF THE SINO-SOVIET IDEOLOGICAL RIVALRY, AS A DEMONSTRATION OF CHINA'S IDENTIFICATION WITH REVOLUTIONARY CAUSES AND PEOPLES. THE PRC, HOWEVER, MUST BE AWARE OF THE RISK THEY RUN, IN THEIR SUPPORT OF THE BCP, OF PUSHING THE BURMESE INTO THE ARMS OF THE SOVIETS. THE SOVIET FACTOR THUS SEEMS TO US HIGHLY AMBIVALENT, SO FAR AS PRC SUPPORT OF THE BCP IS CONCERNED, AND UNLIKELY THEREFORE TO BE A MAJOR PRC MOTIVE.

5. IF WE ARE RIGHT ABOUT CHINESE MOTIVES, THEN PRC SEEMS LIKELY TO SUPPORT THE INSURGENCY UP TO BUT NOT BEYOND THE POINT WHERE A NATURALLY-DEFENSIBLE POSITION OF STRENGTH HAS BEEN CREATED IN THE AFFECTED BORDER AREA. IT SEEMS TO US MOST UNLIKELY THAT PRC WOULD SET ITSELF THE GOAL OF TAKING OVER OR RENDERING SUBSERVIENT THE GUB, THROUGH COALITION OR ANY OTHER TACTICS. EVEN IN THE THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE CASE WHERE THE INERTIA OF BCP SUCCESSES OR GUB INEPTITUDE RESULTED IN COLLAPSE OF GUB RESISTANCE, PRC WOULD HAVE MISGIVINGS ABOUT ESTABLISHING ITS
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"HEGEMONY" OVER NEIGHBOR IN ANY BLATANT WAY.

6. QUESTION ARISES WHAT PRC WOULD DO IF GUB OFFENSIVE CONTINUED AND SEEMED LIKELY TO DEFEAT BCP. WE WOULD SPECULATE THAT WHILE INCREASING GUB PRESSURE ON INSURGENTS MIGHT INITIALLY RESULT IN CORRESPONDING STEP-UP IN PRC SUPPORT, IF GUB SEEMED TO BE WINNING IN SUSTAINED EFFORT, PRC WOULD NOT RESPOND BY ESCALATING LEVEL OF ITS SUPPORT TOWARD OUTRIGHT INTERVENTION WITH PRC FORCES, BUT WOULD PULL BACK, ADVISING ITS BCP CLIENTS TO RECEDE INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE AND WAIT FOR MORE PROPITIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES TO RESUME ACTIVE INSURGENCY.

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7. GUB POLICY OF MINIMIZING SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CHINESE INVOLVEMENT, WHILE CONTINUING TO PURSUE IMPROVEMENT IN STATE RELATIONS WITH PEKING, HAS GIVEN THE PRC LITTLE INCENTIVE TO TERMINATE ITS SUPPORT OF THE INSURGENCY. IT IS THEREFORE WORTH CONSIDERING WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF GUB TOOK ITS CASE BEFORE BAR OF WORLD OPINION. MY OWN OPINION IS THAT SUCH A GUB EFFORT WOULD BE OF LIMITED EFFECT, SO FAR AS ELICITING ANY TANGIBLE SUPPORT FROM OTHER NATIONS IS CONCERNED (THOUGH SOVIETS AND THEIR FRIENDS MIGHT GIVE VERBAL SUPPORT). CHANCES OF CAUSING PRC TO COMPLETELY CEASE ITS SUPPORT OF BCP WOULD, IN MY OPINION, BE LESS THAN EVEN, THOUGH IT MIGHT TRY TO KEEP ITS SUPPORT MORE COVERT. ON OTHER HAND, I DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT PRC WOULD REACT BY INTENSIFYING ITS INVOLVEMENT OR ESCALATING ITS OBJECTIVES BEYOND LEVELS SUGGESTED IN PARA 5 ABOVE.

8. AS TO WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OTHER NEIGHBORS OF THE PRC, THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAVE LED TO RC INVOLVEMENT WITH THE BURMESE INSURGENTS, IF NOT EXACTLY SUI GENERIS, SEEM TO US AT LEAST QUITE RARE. THE RELATIONSHIP TO CHINA'S BORDER SECURITY, AND THE EASE OF ACCESS FROM CHINA, ARE NOT CHARACTERISTIC OF MANY OTHER AREAS OR LIKELY TO BECOME SO. OF COURSE, THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BURMA SITUATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THERE ARE NOT OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MIGHT IMPEL THE PRC TOWARD INVOLVEMENT WITH INSURGENTS. BUT AT LEAST THE BURMESE DEVELOPMENTS, IN OUR VIEW, NEED NOT BE TAKEN AS CAUSE FOR NEW OR GENERAL ALARM. THEY CERTAINLY DO NOT NECESSARILY FORETELL A WAVE OF CHINESE "EXPANSIONISM".
OSBORN

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